

## Paradise Found

**I did not set out deliberately to find it. In fact the week leading up to this discovery had been particularly demanding. Despite the advice from my doctor to exercise regularly in order to control my blood pressure I had once again failed to make it to the gym ... it was now ten o'clock.** We all have weeks like this and I knew things would improve. However, I did not realise how soon that would happen.

On Thursday morning I set off with my wellies in the car. At 9.30am I would be taking my year six science group on a trip to Henley – in - Arden. Most children remember the trips that they go on, they usually stand out over and above the regular school day. For the teachers the same can sometimes be said ... but not always.

We arrived at the Habitat Survival Trust (HST). Two ladies, Molly and Jean, met us in the small gravel driveway which led to a large detached house surrounded by countryside. We followed them into their 'classroom'. Pictures covered the walls which immediately caught my eye. They portrayed animals, plants, the planet and words describing the importance of caring for all life on the Earth. Molly introduced herself and talked about the Trust, the site and all living things on this planet which she quite clearly considers so very important. These words came from her heart as well as her head and were all the reasons why I ended up doing this job and why I continue to do it.

Molly talked about the plight of species worldwide, the effect of pollution (in particular plastic!), habitat destruction and the need to care for all living things emphasising that despite the fact that humans often consider themselves as the most important species we should think of all life as sacred and equal. How much of this the pupils absorbed I can not say but it was an important message beautifully illustrated afterwards by the guest speaker of the day who was a licensed bat handler. She talked to the pupils about their biology, ecology and the need to conserve this incredible group of mammals that have existed since before the dinosaurs. Towards the end of the talk this group of Walkwood pupils were privileged enough to see and handle a rescued pipistrelle bat.

Lunch was taken at the edge of the recently cut wildflower meadow. I wondered, at this point, what else the pupils would experience. Gathering the whole group together Molly and Jean walked us all to the stream which flows through their land. The pupils walked into the stream and I waited for them to receive a talk about either the river or its wildlife. However, very little was said by either Molly or Jean except of course about safety and a few words about the fact that children love to splash around in water and that they could try to dam the stream if they wished. At this point, as most teachers probably would, I became a little nervous to see pupils who were so eager to get on with the job in hand that they did not think to judge the depth of the water against the height of their wellies. They grabbed stones and rocks and beginning the task of building a dam. While most worked together at this task others explored the water and banks. My anxiety soon faded as I watched the

children all have an incredible experience. The HST emphasise how important it is to give children these sort of opportunities especially as childhood (together with the wildlife that they had talked about earlier) is such a valuable but increasingly rare thing these days. Many people have debated and written on the subject of the loss of childhood in our modern world. More wellies filled with water, clothes became wetter and smiles grew - this was such a wonderful place and we had all had an incredible day and experienced childhood.

All good things have to come to an end and as the children attempted to pull off their wellington boots, ring out their socks and climb aboard the mini buses I hoped that they would not just remember this as a great day away from school but that today's experiences would enrich their future for years to come and help them to gain even more from their lives.

Yes, I had failed to get to the gym all week but my blood pressure had been reduced, I had rediscovered my childhood for a short while and I had **found paradise** ... all thanks to Molly and Jean who reminded me just how important, wonderful, and valuable all life is and also reminded me of the reason why I do this job.

The Habitat Survival Trust is a charity and charged nothing for all year six pupils to visit.

Mr Birrell